

Minutes of Town of Amherst Public Works Committee meeting of Tuesday, April 5, 2005 Town Room, Town Hall, 7:00pm

Note: Meeting serves as mandated public hearing for proposed design changes to South Pleasant Street (Route 116) from College Street (Route 9) to Hitchcock Street.

present: Vince O'Connor, Doug Lowing, Guilford Mooring, Rob Crowner

guests: Walter Wolnik (observer), Dan Dulaski (traffic consultant), Aaron Hayden (Planning Board), Jim Brassord (Amherst College), Chris Wall (Berkshire Design Group)

1. Presentation and review of Route 116 proposal Jim explains that this proposal, being presented by Amherst College, would continue the traffic calming around the campus begun on Route 9. Anecdotal and measured evidence shows that traffic speed has been reduced and cars are yielding to pedestrians. The primary issue on Route 116 is traffic speed, which is promoted by the width of the road. The proposed solution would narrow the roadway both in fact and in perception.

Vince requests a pedestrian count on Route 116. Jim explains that no pre- or post- counts were made on Route 9 because it was believed that the volume of foot traffic would not be affected. No traffic light will be installed at Hitchcock Street because analysis shows it is not warranted. Though changes would be made only to Hitchcock Street, the design would coordinate with whatever might eventually happen at Snell Street. Trees will be planted on the east side of the road in front of the athletic complex for both a "friction effect" and to enhance the pedestrian experience. Vince recommends a mix of species.

The width of the road would be reduced from forty or more feet to thirty feet, equally from both sides so as to maintain the current crown in the center. However, traffic would be gradually guided left and right (not up and down) at the intersections by the introduction of islands that would serve to make crossing the street safer for pedestrians in addition to slowing traffic speed. The road width would be the same, but travel lanes would be narrower. Vince notes that MassHighway took away the pedestrian island on Amity Street at North Pleasant.

Vince recommends slightly raising the grade of the crosswalks relative to the street in order to avoid puddles or ice where people might be standing or walking. Jim adds that accumulation of water would also accelerate deterioration of the islands. Vince recommends that the crosswalk pattern be consistent with that used in the downtown area, but Jim states that they will be consistent with that on Route 9.

Guilford states that the Transportation and Bicycle Committee liked the proposed narrower bike lanes because of the current problem of right-side passing at intersections. Vince is concerned that an absence of turn lanes at Hitchcock Street and at the entrance to the College will cause traffic backups. Dan notes that right-side passing is illegal and states that the number of vehicles making those turns is not very high and that gaps in oncoming traffic are usually large enough to allow turns in a short time. Vince does not agree with Dan's interpretation of the legality of right-side passing, but suggests posting a sign at the first driveway warning vehicles not to stop in the intersection on a red light. Chris believes that right-side passing will still be possible, but that it would have to be done more slowly.

Jim describes the project as creating an intro-to-town zone on the southern approach to the town center.

Doug notes that College Hall is a high-frequency destination point and wonders about the measures intended to discourage crossing directly in front of it. Jim explains that the project will attempt to change desire lines by removing the walkway and stairs in front of College Hall and guiding pedestrians to the ramp at the crosswalk near the entrance to the College.

Jim states that streetscape lighting will be installed at all crosswalks and there will be flashing LCD lighting in the road and on signs, as on Route 9. Amherst College will own two moveable signs to post during special events. The location of the crosswalks at Walnut and Hitchcock Streets will be moved slightly, and sidewalks will be designed to guide pedestrians to them. Dan explains that overhead lighting tends to glare out people waiting at the side of a road, while streetscape lighting will enable them to be lit from

behind. Guilford clarifies that overhead lights are focused on the crosswalk itself rather than pedestrians using it. Vince suggests that the design committee examine the crosswalks on the section of North Pleasant Street within UMass. Vince strongly recommends keeping crosswalks simple and well-lighted.

Vince asks who will maintain the road and whether the materials and construction will reflect well on the town. Guilford states that maintenance concerns will be no different than anywhere else in town, and that the structure of the boulevards and crosswalks is good. Jim states that construction will be quicker than on Route 9 because there will be less subsurface work and that the plan calls for materials to be in hand before demolition begins. Vince asks that utility covers on South Pleasant Street be made clean and flush with the street. Jim states that work would occur this summer, and in order to get the materials in advance, a decision is needed soon.

Guilford states that all committees that have reviewed this project so far \_Public Transportation and Bicycle Committee, Design Review Board, Planning Board, Handicap Access Group, Historical Commission, and Land Use Group \_have endorsed it. Doug is reluctant to recommend it without more substantial public input. Vince suggests that the Select Board should hold its own public hearing, since it would be better publicized. Jim notes that Amherst College is committed to following the process established by the Town and does not want to repeat the controversy of the Route 9 project.

Doug would like to recommend planting vegetation on the slope in front of College Hall to prevent people from crossing South Pleasant Street there. Vince is concerned about in-street lighting overwhelming the lighting of pedestrians and being a distraction to drivers. Rob agrees with taking measures to discourage crossing the street where there is no crosswalk, but does not want to make a recommendation about lighting design. Guilford suggests breaking up the motion to report separate votes.

The committee votes 3-0 to recommend the proposed design to the Select Board, with the qualification of adding vegetation in front of College Hall, and to strongly encourage the Board to hold a public hearing prior to its vote. The committee votes 2-1 to favor use of a "passive" pedestrian zone sign rather than the flashing ones in place at either end of the Route 9 zone, and 2-1 to emphasize a balance of in-ground and street lighting at the crosswalks.

## 2. Bridge Street speed limit

Vince distributes a letter submitted by residents of the Bridge Street/Pine Street neighborhood that requests restoration of the 25mph speed limit sign on Bridge Street. Guilford states that if the public record shows that a speed limit is in effect there, a sign can be installed. However, if it cannot be confirmed, then a traffic study must be done before the Select Board can act. Such a study might indicate that a speed limit of greater than 25mph is warranted.

Doug moves to request that the Superintendent of Public Works verify and post the speed limit on Bridge Street; and if this cannot be done, to encourage the Select Board to take the necessary steps to determine and post the speed limit. The motion is approved by a 3-0 vote.

## 3. Traffic idling

Vince requests that the committee consider his memo regarding traffic idling, distributed several meetings ago. The memo proposes several steps to reduce idling by permitting right turns on red at certain intersections and adjusting traffic light responsiveness at others. Rob would like more time to discuss these issues and notes that there are additional items on the current agenda. Guilford agrees to add these items to the agenda for the next meeting.

## 4. Sidewalks

Guilford distributes information pertinent to consideration of possible new sidewalk construction, viz. PWC priority lists from 1992, 1994, and 1999; and the list of new requests in the last year. The old lists contain projects still pending for the most part. Only Belchertown Road (Gatehouse to Rolling Green) and University Drive have been done, while College Street (South East to S. Whitney) is underway. The recent requests include Old Farm Road (the blind curve), Station Road (Wildflower to Rail Trail), Red Gate Lane/Hills Road (Strong to N. Whitney), and East Hadley Road (realign so it doesn't cross the street three

times). There is about \$30,000 in the budget for sidewalks, but this covers both repairs and new construction. The sidewalk condition inventory is now available.

Vince expresses interest in examining the East Hadley Road and Old Farm Road issues. He requests cost estimates. Walter mentions a right-of-way violation at the old Grist Mill property. Doug is reluctant to recommend any new project in light of the budget situation.

#### 5. Roads

Guilford states that there is about \$600,000 available from the state for road repair and traffic light replacement. New controllers will utilize cameras to sense vehicles. They will also enable traffic counts to be performed, but not be used for surveillance. Many streets need to be repaired; there is probably not enough money to do all of them.

Vince states that Summer Street is overdue for repair. Guilford states that a drainage plan needs to be designed before the street can be fixed. Some sewer fund money and some Chapter 90 money could be used for this project. Vince believes that sewer fund money should cover all of it, since it was a sewer project that created the problem.

Guilford explains that Chapter 90 money should be allocated over two seasons: before and after winter. The most paving the DPW can handle in one year is \$700-800,000. There are only three road contractors in the area, so there is only a limited amount that can be done. The current state funding level is \$600,000, and Guilford prefers to keep a year's worth of funding available (about \$800,000). With about \$400,000 to be spent on Main and South East Streets and another \$600,000 due to be collected in August, Doug estimates that there will be about \$150-200,000 to spend on other road projects this year.

Vince does not think the public will find this satisfactory. He reiterates that Summer Street, Sandhill Road, Henry Street, and Shutesbury Road are in very bad shape. Guilford states that the necessary drainage work would have to be contracted out in order for those roads to be done this year. Doug states that a cost estimate for drainage work on those roads that cannot be done without it would enable the committee to explain how things get prioritized the way that they do. Vince states that we should also have an idea of the schedule.

#### 6. South Amherst Common

Guilford states that the South Amherst Common traffic proposal will be presented at the Munson Library next week.

#### 7. Meeting adjourned 10:00pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Rob Crowner